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**STUDY  
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**THE BOARD FOR  
LOW INTENSITY CONFLICT:  
IS IT FUNCTIONING?**

BY

**LIEUTENANT COLONEL WILLIAM J. LESZCZYNSKI, JR.**  
United States Army

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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

THE BOARD FOR LOW INTENSITY CONFLICT: IS IT FUNCTIONING?

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

Lieutenant Colonel William J. Leszczynski, Jr.  
United States Army

Captain Ryan J. McCombie, USN  
Project Adviser

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U.S. Army War College  
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# ABSTRACT

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The end of the former Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War make the chance of a superpower confrontation remote. However, as the world takes on a multi-polar dimension, the prognosis is that Low Intensity Conflict (LIC) will continue unabated with concomitant implications for U.S. national security. In order to be successful in LIC, the U.S. must be organized at the national level to properly utilize the diverse elements of national power. In 1986, Public Law 99-661 directed that the President establish a Board for Low Intensity Conflict within the National Security Council to coordinate the policies of the United States for LIC. To date, the LIC board has not functioned as intended by Congress. Until this deficiency is corrected, the U.S. will not have the forward looking, fully coordinated and integrated inter-agency effort envisioned by the lawmakers and required to support our national security policy.

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## INTRODUCTION

The world has entered a new era. The end of Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War, and the move to the New World Order are certainly causes for relief and celebration for peaceful people everywhere. Few analysts would have predicted the world situation as it exists today.

For over 40 years, the United States national strategy was clearly focused on the Soviets. Since March 12, 1947, when President Truman delivered his historic message to a joint session of Congress, calling for aid to Greece and Turkey, the U.S. has pursued a policy of containment. Truman's call to "support free people who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or outside pressures"<sup>1</sup> has lead this nation down many different paths in the far corners of the world. Subsequent U.S. presidents followed Truman's lead. A strong argument can be made that the policy Truman so eloquently articulated that day, designed to elicit the support of Congress and the American people was actually the beginning of the end of the Soviet World. The final disposition of the old Soviet Union, is, of course, unknown. However, there is serious doubt if any single republic from the old USSR, including Russia, or any group of republics for that matter could present the same challenge to U.S. national interests that the Soviets presented as late as 1989. Today, the chances of a superpower confrontation appear very remote.

The end of the Cold War has focused more attention on domestic challenges in the U.S., most notably the status of the American economy. This natural phenomenon, which seems to follow every U.S.

war, has Americans clamoring to spend the "peace dividend" to fix the multitude of real and imagined internal problems. To the average citizen, the end of the USSR meant the end of conflict, at least as it impacts on the U.S.

However, before complete relaxation, predicated on the cancellation of World War III due to lack of international interest, we would be wise to reflect on challenges to U.S. national security. Examination of both the past and current world situation reveals that threats still in fact exist. As the world takes on a more multi-polar dimension, the prognosis is that Low Intensity Conflict (LIC) will continue to have implications for U.S. national security. The question is, are we organized at the national level to meet the challenging requirements of LIC to be successful?

The answer at this time is no. The U.S. currently lacks the interagency mechanism to successfully handle the numerous, diverse challenges that LIC will present in this rapidly changing world. There is no functioning agency at the top to harness the diverse elements of national power, despite legislation enacted in 1986 which was clear in purpose and directed the President to establish a Board for Low Intensity Conflict. Until this happens, the possibility of a coordinated LIC effort that supports our National Security Strategy is remote.

#### LOW INTENSITY CONFLICT, EXACTLY WHAT IS IT?

Low Intensity Conflict is an ambiguous term. Like pornography, it means different things to different people.<sup>2</sup>

Great debates have taken place for years between doctrine writers searching for a precise definition of LIC. Terms have come and gone as experts have undertaken the task of making the definition of LIC meaningful and precise in the hopes that an exact definition would perhaps make the job of understanding LIC easier. LIC is probably more difficult for Americans to understand because our focus, for over 40 years, was at the opposite end of the conflict spectrum as we prepared for the seemingly inevitable super power confrontation that never materialized. A study done by six military officers at the John F. Kennedy School of Government offers the following reason for our dilemma:

Low-Intensity Conflict, or LIC, is particularly difficult to understand because the term does not describe something that can be visualized instantly. It is a catch all phrase that has come to describe a constellation of military, economic, and political activities that take place within a broad environment that is also difficult to describe. We call this environment "unstable peace," that is, peaceful to those who are geographically removed from the problem but unstable and often violent to those who are directly involved.<sup>3</sup>

FM 100-20/AFP 3-20, Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict points out that the term itself reflects "an American perspective. Indeed, the term is a misnomer. To peoples more directly affected, the threat is immediate and vital. To us, it is subtle, indirect, and long-term; but potentially it is just as serious."<sup>4</sup>

What we currently refer to as Low Intensity Conflict has been called many things in years passed. Revolutionary warfare, unconventional warfare, subversive warfare, guerrilla warfare,

protracted war, surrogate war, shadow war, covert war, brushfire wars, and peripheral war are but a fraction of the terms that have been used.<sup>5</sup> The term guerrilla warfare was first used in the early 19th Century as the outnumbered Spanish fought Napoleon's powerful armies. The term unconventional warfare first appeared in military publications in the 1950s and gained prominence as the U.S. became more involved in Vietnam.<sup>6</sup>

The military has long understood the multi-dimensional approach required for success. An Infantry School publication in 1966, Selected Readings in Guerrilla and Counter guerrilla Operations, pointed out the requirement for "the integration of political, economic, psychological and military components into a long term strategy that gives the indigenous system legitimacy and credibility."<sup>7</sup>

Both Joint Test Pub 3-07, Doctrine for Joint Operations in Low Intensity Conflict, and FM 100-20/AFP 3-20 use the following definition for LIC taken from Joint Pub 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms:

Low intensity conflict is a political-military confrontation between contending states or groups below conventional war and above the routine, peaceful competition among states. It frequently involves protracted struggles of competing principles and ideologies. Low intensity conflict ranges from subversion to the use of armed force. It is waged by a combination of means, employing political economic informational, and military instruments. Low intensity conflicts are often localized, generally in the Third World but contain regional and global security implications.<sup>8</sup>

Of significant note is that the word "political" precedes "military" in the definition. What is sometimes forgotten is that



"although all elements of U.S. national power are applied concurrently, the primary emphasis is usually on political solutions."<sup>9</sup> Both Joint Test Pub 3-07 and FM 100-20/AFP 3-20 list five low intensity conflict imperatives with primacy of the political objective/political dominance being the driving force "at every level, from the strategic to the tactical."<sup>10</sup>

A question often asked is why should the U.S. take on the complex challenges of LIC, especially when there is no direct threat to a vital national interest? FM 100-20/AFP 3-20 offers the following: "Unfavorable outcomes of LIC may gradually isolate the United States, its allies, and its global trading partners from each other and from the world community. . . . Conversely, successful LIC operations, consistent with U.S. interests and laws, can advance U.S. international goals such as the growth of freedom, democratic institutions, and free market economies."<sup>11</sup> As James R. Locher III, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict, so succinctly stated "Terrorism, civil wars, and remote insurgencies may not threaten our interests with the same immediacy and clarity as did the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, but a succession of unaddressed low intensity conflict challenges can destabilize the international order that is essential for our security and prosperity."<sup>12</sup> The U.S. may become involved in LIC, if for no other reason than we cannot live with the negative results of non-participation.

## PROGNOSIS FOR THE FUTURE

In the realm of military strategy, we confront danger more ambiguous than those we previously faced. . . not a particular, poised enemy but the nascent threats of power vacuums and regional instabilities.<sup>13</sup>

By the end of 1990, the Cold War which had dominated American strategic thought for so many years was over. A conventional arms agreement was signed in November by the members of the Convention on Security and Cooperation (CSCE), along with NATO and Warsaw Pact countries. The agreement made the chance of a future superpower conflict in Europe very improbable.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, many experts contend that LIC will continue unabated. Steven Metz, Professor of National Security Affairs at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College believes that there will be no decrease. As he points out, "It is easy for Americans, anxious to abandon the Cold War in order to focus on economic revitalization, to expect too much too soon . . . it would be naive to believe that low intensity conflict will wither away as a threat to American national interests."<sup>15</sup> He postures three reasons why LIC will survive. First, dissatisfaction with the status quo will continue, much of it due to perceived relative deprivation. Technological advances, especially in the media, along with education and urbanization has brought relative disparity of quality of life to many poor areas of the world. Second, there are a number of "sponsors" in the world who are willing and have the capability to train, equip, and finance political violence. Finally, the constraints which shaped low intensity conflict continue. The major constraint in most instances is resources.<sup>16</sup>

In a 1991 study done at the Strategic Studies Institute, Donald M. Snow, cites numerous problems which lead to instability. These include burgeoning population, maldistribution of food, poverty, economic under development and maldistribution of economic resources, infrastructural deficiencies, the need for political development and stability, and environmental degradation.<sup>17</sup> Even without "Cold War competition" Snow contends conflict and violence will continue for three reasons. First, superpower withdrawal removes a source of restraint. Next, boundary problems, religious and historical enemies, and political instability still exist with no moderator. The final reason is that regional powers see little incentive to fix the problems.<sup>18</sup>

#### UNITED STATES PARTICIPATION IN LIC

Sometimes, it appears that LIC is new to the U.S. This is incorrect. Whatever the term used, be it revolutionary warfare, guerrilla warfare, shadow war or some other name, the U.S. has had significant involvement in LIC over the years. As Loren B. Thompson, an internationally known LIC expert explains "The term low intensity conflict is relatively new; the phenomena it describes are not. Throughout its history, the United States has been confronted by adversaries who used unconventional tactics and elusive formations rather than massed fire-power and numerical superiority to achieve politico-military objectives."<sup>19</sup>

U.S. participation in LIC can be traced back to at least the American Revolution where the colonists used unconventional military tactics to help defeat the British.<sup>20</sup> In 1804, the United

States Marines conducted a raid on Tripoli which can be characterized as a special operations victory.<sup>21</sup> During much of the later part of the nineteenth century, the Army devoted considerable attention and resources to protect people living on the frontiers and subdue the Indians.<sup>22</sup> The Spanish American War of 1898 found U.S. forces once again in the middle of LIC and from 1899-1913, Americans were committed in counterinsurgency operations in the Philippines.<sup>23</sup>

U.S. support for partisan and guerrilla operations during World War II in both theaters of war has been well documented. Embroiled in the midst of the "ultimate" high intensity conflict of the century, the U.S. conducted irregular operations against the Germans and Japanese, including the creation of intelligence networks, guerrilla armies, and resistance groups in occupied France, Poland, and the Philippines.<sup>24</sup>

During the Cold War insurgency and counterinsurgency support became an important part of the U.S. policy of containment. Wherever the "Russian Bear" lurked, U.S. support followed in places like Laos, Angola, Afghanistan and various countries in Central America.<sup>25</sup> Vietnam, called a counterinsurgency by many, became a testing ground for "this new kind of war."<sup>26</sup>

In October 1983, Operation URGENT FURY, the American invasion of Grenada took place. This was the largest military operation since Vietnam, clearly falling into the rubric of LIC.<sup>27</sup>

The end of the decade brought further U.S. involvement in LIC. On 5 April 1988, the 7th Infantry Division (Light) deployed an

aviation task force to the Republic of Panama. Called Task Force Hawk, its mission was "to provide security augmentation to U.S. military forces in Panama and train for all contingency missions."<sup>28</sup> Initially consisting of a mixed bag of UH60, AH1G, and OH58 helicopters, this task force remained in Panama and flew missions during the JUST CAUSE H-hour assaults, over 20 months later.

Concerned over increasing instability caused by Noriega, President Bush initiated Operation NIMROD DANCER in May 1989. This contingency operation, consisting of approximately 1,900 personnel, sent soldiers from Fort Ord and Fort Polk, along with Marines from Camp Lejeune, to Panama to defend the integrity and security of United States defense sites and protect United States military and Department of Defense civilian populations.<sup>29</sup> Like their predecessors from TF Hawk, these soldiers and Marines also were an important part of JUST CAUSE H-hour activities.

It is not surprising that the decade ended and 1990 began with the United States once again heavily committed in LIC. In response to the murder of Marine Lieutenant Robert Paz, President Bush gave the execution order for Operation JUST CAUSE.<sup>30</sup> Employing 22,500 troops, the U.S. quickly eliminated Panamanian Defense Force resistance and eventually captured Noreiga.<sup>31</sup>

In summary, the U.S. has had significant LIC experience. One study indicates that the U.S. has been involved in LIC 60 times since 1899.<sup>32</sup> The prevailing opinion is that U.S. involvement in LIC will continue to grow.

## LOW INTENSITY CONFLICT IS NOT SIMPLY SPECIAL OPERATIONS

A common misperception is that LIC only applies to the military, in particular to Special Operations Forces (SOF). In other words, LIC equals SOF. Perhaps it is because conflict, whatever the intensity, seems to fit neatly under the military umbrella. SOF, to include Army Special Forces, Navy SEALs, and Air Force Special Operations Wings, along with other elements of SOF, are certainly suited to handle military operations in the four categories of support for insurgency and counterinsurgency, combatting terrorism, peacekeeping operations, and peacetime contingency operations. Much has been written, both good and bad, about recent performances of SOF in Grenada, Panama, and Operations DESERT SHIELD/STORM, so a natural conduit seems to exist which drives the belief that LIC is simply SOF in action.

To further complicate the issue, PL 99-661 addressed both Special Operations and LIC. Section 1211, paragraph (a)(4), created one Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict, inextricably linking SOF to LIC, at least in DOD.<sup>33</sup>

To convolute the issue further, paragraph (2)(j) listed 10 special operations activities that are used interchangeably. As written, the legislation seems to imply that "SOF is the primary LIC instrument."<sup>34</sup> Again, it is an easy transition to LIC equals SOF.

In a 1989 article, General James J. Lindsay, the first commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command, clearly stated

that "special operations and LIC are not synonymous."<sup>35</sup> Additionally, he warned that "the military has an important role but not the primary one."<sup>36</sup>

Examination of the current definitions of LIC and special operations may help in understanding. Phrases such as "political-military confrontation . . . above the routine, peaceful competition among states . . . protracted struggles of competing principles and ideologies," describe a set of circumstances or an environment.<sup>37</sup>

The definition of special operations in JCS Pub 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms is as follows: "Operations conducted by specially trained, equipped, and organized DoD forces against strategic or tactical targets in pursuit of national military, political, economic, or psychological objectives."<sup>38</sup> This describes an ability to perform a function, or in military terms, a capability.

#### THE CONGRESS AND LIC

The 1987 Defense Authorization Bill was a unique piece of legislation and provides an interesting study of the inner workings of Congress and the Department of Defense. The legislation resulted from separate bills in the House and in the Senate, had strong bipartisan support, and was extremely specific and directive in nature.<sup>39</sup> The legislation, directed the formation of a unified combatant command, the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), and created the position for Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity. Section 101 of

the National Security Act of 1947 was amended by adding the following "(f) The president should establish within the National Security Council a board to be known as the 'Board for Low Intensity Conflict'. The principal function of the board shall be to coordinate the policies of the United States for low intensity conflict."<sup>40</sup>

The belief in Congress at the time was that the legislation was sorely needed. Direct conflict between Soviet and U.S. forces was viewed as diminishing. At the same time, the Soviets were busy engaging surrogates throughout the world.<sup>41</sup> Secretary of State George Schultz stated on 15 January 1986 that "Low Intensity conflict is the prime challenge we will face, at least through the remainder of this century. The future of peace and freedom may well depend on how effectively we meet it."<sup>42</sup> A number of influential Congressmen, led by Senators Nunn and Cohen, felt that LIC was the most likely threat to U.S. security and interests and that the U.S. was ill prepared to handle the threat.<sup>43</sup>

In July 1985, the United States Army Training and Doctrine Command, under the direction of the Army Chief of Staff, began the Joint Low Intensity Conflict Project. The project was initiated because it was felt that the U.S. did not understand LIC, could not fully use U.S. capabilities in LIC, lacked adequate organization, and current efforts were less than required for prudent national defense.<sup>44</sup>

The final report, published in August 1986, painted an ugly picture. The report summary stated "Four themes prevail throughout



the report: As a nation, we do not understand low intensity conflict; we respond without unity of effort; we execute our activities poorly; and we lack the ability to sustain operations."<sup>45</sup> This simply added fuel to the fire already burning in Congress.

There is no doubt that one of the primary purposes of the legislation was to dramatically improve the capabilities of U.S. SOF. Recent U.S. performances in the SOF arena had been poor. Desert One, URGENT FURY and the Achilles Lauro hijacking indicated serious problems in key areas such as organizational structure, command and control, training, integration with conventional units, and equipment.<sup>46</sup> At the same time it appeared that some of our allies were enjoying remarkable success. GSG-9, the German Counterterrorist Unit, successfully rescued 82 hostages on a hijacked Lufthansa 737 in Mogadishu, Somalia. The British had been successful employing their SOF on a number of occasions and the lawmakers could always point to the Israeli operation at Entebbe.<sup>47</sup>

It is interesting to note that the final legislation reflected the Senate view more than the House view. The House version (HR 5901) resulted from two years of extensive work under the leadership of Representative Dan Daniel (D-VA) who was an early proponent of SOF changes. Daniel, the Chairman of Readiness Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee, had been influenced by a number of SOF reformers, most notably LTG(Ret) Samuel V. Wilson, a highly decorated and distinguished soldier with extensive SOF background dating back to OSS service in World War

II. LTG(Ret) Wilson was a member of the Holloway Special Operation Review Group which analyzed why the Iran mission had failed. Wilson's agenda was definitely SOF change. There is no doubt that his focus in this area, which influenced Daniel, resulted in the House limiting their concentration to SOF reform.<sup>48</sup>

The Senate Bill (S2453) was more encompassing than the House bill, and was designed to force more comprehensive changes in the way the U.S. conducted business in LIC. The central theme of the House bill was to enhance SOF. The Senate bill targeted the Administration and sought "to integrate planning and preparation for LIC within the government."<sup>49</sup> There were four objectives of the legislation "(1) providing close civilian oversight for low intensity conflict activities; (2) ensuring that genuine expertise and a diversity of views are available to the National Command Authorities regarding possible responses to low intensity conflict threats; (3) improving interagency planning and coordination for low intensity conflict, and (4) bolstering U.S. special operations capabilities in a number of areas including joint doctrine for training, intelligence support, command and control, budgetary authority, personnel management, and planning."<sup>50</sup>

In retrospect, the lawmakers showed remarkable insight into LIC. Not only did they understand the problem that existed in DoD, but they understood that successful prosecution of LIC required far more than simply a unique application of the military instrument of national power. It required a total inter-agency effort and an organization at the top of the pyramid to pull the entire program

together. That organization was the Board for Low Intensity Conflict.

#### EARLY INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION FOR LIC

The legislation which established the Board for Low Intensity Conflict was not the first attempt made by an administration to effectively deal with LIC. As early as 1947, the Office of Special Programs established by Secretary of Defense Forrestal, was given responsibility for unconventional warfare planning and psychological operations and coordinated with the newly established National Security Council, Central Intelligence Agency, and State-Army-Navy-Air Force Coordinating Committee.<sup>51</sup>

Under President Eisenhower, the Operations Coordinating Board was established. The Board's responsibilities included covert operations and LIC. Unconventional warfare and psychological warfare, which had been handled by the Office of Special Programs under the Truman administration, was given to the Office of Special Operations in the Defense Department.<sup>52</sup>

When President Kennedy assumed office, he clearly understood the unconventional threat and immediately went about the task of organizing the U.S. to meet the challenge.

In January 1961, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev endorsed "wars of national liberation" and the new president became personally involved in establishing the policy for countering the threat. In National Security Action Memorandum 2 (NSAM 2) he directed the military to increase their emphasis on counter guerrilla units. Kennedy recognized that LIC required more

than just DoD participation. Through his arm twisting, the Department of State, which regarded LIC as a military problem, appointed a director for internal defense.<sup>53</sup>

The same year, the U.S. Strike Command was established. This was the first of two significant military reorganizations designed to counter third world threats. In 1963, U.S. Southern Command was created to focus on the threat in Latin America.<sup>54</sup>

In 1962, Kennedy approved NSAM 124. Kennedy created a high-powered committee called the Special Group (Counterinsurgency) composed of high ranking military and civilians including his brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy. The Special Group (Counterinsurgency), had four functions. The last function "to ensure the development of adequate interdepartmental programs . . . and to resolve any interdepartmental problems which might impede their implementation" was clearly a call for coordination of all national efforts.<sup>55</sup> Kennedy followed with NSAM 182 in August 1962. The Overseas Internal Defense Policy (OIDP) Memorandum targeted guerrilla threats in the third world. It also clearly spelled out the responsibilities for the various government agencies, departments and the Special Group (Counter-Insurgency).<sup>56</sup>

There is no doubt that President Kennedy gave unprecedented priority to the LIC effort. His efforts to upgrade U.S. military capabilities in this area are certainly the most visible and the most emphasized, due in large measure to his expansion of Army Special Forces and creation of Navy SEALs. It is obvious that Kennedy understood that high level integration and coordination was

required for the United States to successfully bring all elements of national power to bear in LIC.

Ironically, not all shared his view, especially in Department of State, who should have taken the lead. Their representative on the Special Group (Counter-Insurgency), for example, was the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, a subordinate level bureaucrat when compared to the other members.<sup>57</sup> Kennedy's frustration was articulated by a senior Defense Department official who wrote that the Department of State ". . . appeared to consider problems of internal conflict a diversion from their main interest of foreign policy and diplomacy."<sup>58</sup>

President Johnson made only minor changes to what President Kennedy had established. Unfortunately, by the end of his term in office support for LIC was dramatically waning, due in large measure to the quagmire in Vietnam. The three following administrations gave little priority to LIC and until President Reagan faced the challenge of insurgency and counterinsurgency support in Africa, Afghanistan and Central America, LIC was a "back burner" issue.<sup>59</sup>

#### THE FUNDAMENTAL CHALLENGE

Low Intensity Conflict presents broad political-military problems that require balanced application of economic, political, informational, and military instruments of national power. Many government departments and agencies, therefore, must be involved in developing and executing plans for resolving Low Intensity Conflict situations. Under such circumstances, coordination must be extensive, and it can be difficult to effect.<sup>60</sup>

Therein lies both the fundamental challenge and the key to U.S. success in LIC. Much has been written on the need for a

balanced application of the elements of national power and inter-agency coordination. The task of coordinating LIC requires a Herculean effort. As political scientists Steve Smith and Michael Clarke concluded in 1985 ". . . the government is not a monolith but a set of bureaucratic organizations, with policy emerging as the result of, at best, compromise and, at worst, simply the combination of their separate policies."<sup>61</sup> The question is, how are we doing? The answer is, not very good and the real key may not lie simply in dissecting LIC, but how the NSC in reality actually functions.

The reason that progress has been less than anticipated may go back to the battle that took place prior to the enactment of PL 99-661 in November 1986. Neither the Reagan Administration nor DoD wanted the legislation coming on the heels of the Goldwater-Nichols Act. The CJCS, Admiral William Crowe argued against legislative change and proposed a DoD plan for SOF reorganization.<sup>62</sup> The bottom line is that the legislation was forced on DoD and the Administration.

Even after the law was signed, the foot dragging continued. The Navy continued to fight to retain control of their SEALs, eventually losing the battle. The ASD (SOLIC) position was not filled for almost 18 months and required enactment of another Public Law in December 1987. PL 100-180, directed the Secretary of the Army to fill the ASD (SOLIC) position until Senate confirmation of "a person appointed from civilian life by the president."<sup>63</sup>

However, in the last six years, DoD has moved out smartly, attempting to comply with both the spirit and the intent of PL 99-661. USSOCOM is thriving and as a result the SOF capabilities of the United States offer the NCA a highly trained force which can be utilized, if required, across the entire spectrum of conflict. The military instrument of national power is alive and well.

Two administrations, however, have not done as well as DoD. Unfortunately, the military is only one element of national power, primarily a supporting actor in LIC, and certainly not responsible for interagency coordination.

As stated previously, PL 99-661 directed the president to establish a LIC board within the NSC to coordinate U.S. policies for LIC.<sup>64</sup> The board, established by the President, included eight permanent members, DoD, DoS, CIA, DCI, Treasury, Commerce, Justice, and USIA and was to replace the numerous groups (Interagency, Senior Interagency, Restricted Interagency) that developed LIC policy guidance.<sup>65</sup> The board was also to "provide the NSC and the President with a clear, consistent, and coordinated stream of LIC management advice."<sup>66</sup> The board was clearly seen by the Congress as the key to interagency coordination and the solution to the unity of effort requirement for successful prosecution of the LIC effort. A study done by National Security Fellows in 1986-87 stated that "the Board for Low Intensity Conflict is one of the keys to solving the LIC puzzle."<sup>67</sup>

## IS THE LIC BOARD FUNCTIONING AS INTENDED?

The real question is, has the LIC board done anything to enhance the interagency coordination process as envisioned by PL 99-661 or is the board simply "a check the block exercise" that complies with the letter of the legislation but misses the intent? If the latter is true then the board offers virtually nothing and may in fact detract from the overall effort.

The short answer is that the LIC board is not functioning as intended. Under President Reagan, the board never met and under President Bush, by October 1990 the board had only met twice.<sup>68</sup> Considering that Public Law 99-661 was effective in November 1986, it would be hard to make a very convincing argument that this part of the legislation was taken very seriously, at least by two different presidents.

The Congress wanted "high rollers" involved in LIC. Then, they believed, LIC would receive the attention it deserved. The White House was fairly quick to respond and on 15 June 1987, published what was then a secret document, National Security Decision Directive Number 277 (NSDD 277), National Policy and Strategy for Low Intensity Conflict. Much of the content of NSDD 277 is now found in our basic doctrinal manuals, Joint Pub 3-07 and FM 100-20/AFP 3-20. The first paragraph covered the objective:

This National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) promulgates a national policy and strategy for Low Intensity Conflict, identifies resources for implementing the strategy, and defines a consistent and lasting approach for interagency planning and coordination.<sup>69</sup>



Under Actions and Implementation, the NSDD directed that "A process must be established to ensure Low Intensity Conflict situations are recognized early. Ways must also be found to ensure that the U.S. can effectively and consistently deal with such situations."<sup>70</sup>

NSDD 277 also directed that the Board for Low Intensity Conflict would be the Senior Review Group (SRG) which was established previously by NSDD 276, with four additional members: the Attorney General, the Secretary of the Treasury, the Secretary of Commerce, and the Director of the United States Information Agency. The National Security Advisor was designated as chairman.<sup>71</sup> Unfortunately, the principles never met under the Reagan Administration.

The outgoing National Security Advisor to President Reagan, Colin Powell, realized that a disconnect existed between legislative intent and reality and recommended that the NSC Deputies Committee (NSC/DC) become the LIC board. Members of the Deputies Committee include the Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Deputy Director of Central Intelligence and Vice Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. He also recommended that an NSC Policy Coordinating Committee (NSC/PCC) for LIC be established with status equal to other NSC/PCCs.<sup>72</sup>

The new National Security Advisor, Brent Scowcroft was determined to streamline the NCS to prevent the possibility of

another Iran-Contra affair. Under his direction, the NSC/DC did become the LIC board. However, no NSC/PCC for LIC was established. Study groups and working groups began to appear but because they were not formally sanctioned under National Security Direction 1 (NSD-1), the "charter" for the NSC, the groups had no real authority. By not creating an NSC/PCC for LIC, Scowcroft had essentially "neutered" the LIC Board.<sup>73</sup>

At the time, Ambassador David C. Miller, Jr. was serving as Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs with responsibilities for international counternarcotics strategy, counter-terrorism, low-intensity conflict and African affairs. In order to force what he believed to be necessary changes in the LIC arena, a document called the Draft Response to NSR 27 was prepared under his direction.<sup>74</sup> The document, which was extremely unpopular, had ten recommendations. Recommendation #2, critical to coordination of the LIC effort, was "that a PCC for LIC be created, to be chaired by the NSC staff. This PCC will compliment the country-specific expertise of the regional PCCs."<sup>75</sup> Unfortunately, no interagency consensus could be obtained because of departmental objections. Because of typical foot dragging, NSR 27 (Draft) was never fully implemented and died a beauractic death.<sup>76</sup>

Although which department spoke out against the LIC board in unknown, reasonable speculation would lead to the conclusion that it probably was the Department of State. Both JCS and OSD did support a LIC PCC and DoS chairs the PCC for the regional areas (Africa, Latin America, Asia, Middle East and Europe) through their

Assistant Secretary of State desk officers. The PCC for LIC would have been chaired by another department, thereby infringing on DoS turf.

The LIC PCC would have had equal status with the functional and regional PCCs. Additionally, like the other PCCs, the LIC PCC would have had access to the Deputies Committee with all the clout that the Deputies Committee possesses. If unhappy with the results of the interagency process, the LIC Chairman could go to the Deputies Committee to obtain help, or when required, the "club" that was necessary to force interagency cooperation.

#### SO WHAT'S THE IMPACT?

The bottom line is there is no capability for long range planning or coordination for LIC at the interagency level because a functional body designed to do this does not currently exist and has never existed. The NSC, by its nature and design, is crisis management oriented and lacks long range focus. Unfortunately, with LIC, long range vision is required to handle the preventative steps before a crisis occurs. By slimming down the NSC in response to Iran-Contra, Scowcroft in essence guaranteed that it would be a crisis management group and nothing else. Although the reason for LIC neglect at the NSC is not known, it was postured that Scowcroft and his deputy, Robert Gates, who were Soviet strategic specialists, concentrated on Cold War issues.<sup>7</sup>

Without long range planning, the U.S. will continue to play catch-up in the LIC arena and will be unable to bring to bear the awesome force available through proper synchronization of all the

elements of national power. When forced into 11th hour decisions, the U.S. runs the risk of getting involved too late, having to commit military forces as the only feasible alternative, or neglecting some situation with significant negative impact on our national security. The Cold War is over and we must adjust our strategy consistent with the new challenges we face.

#### WHAT'S THE SOLUTION?

LIC needs to be viewed again as an important national security issue. This probably will require a radical shift in paradigms for some people at the highest echelons of our government. A good place to start the process is with the President. There is a saying in the military "a unit does well only those things the Commander checks." Stated another way, an organization adapts to the boss' priorities. The first step then needs to be emphasis on LIC. This will not be easy, especially for an administration that is inwardly focused on the many challenges of seemingly important domestic issues.

As with any cause or issue that competes for scarce resources, LIC needs advocacy. As the Army SOF community has found, in many instances the hard way, without a sponsor or advocate, the bureaucratic inertia is virtually overwhelming. SOF had such an advocate in the late 1970s in Army Chief-of-Staff, General Edward C. Meyer, who was instrumental and "helped plant a seed which would later be nurtured by a small group of determined and concerned Congressmen."<sup>78</sup> This advocate must be someone in a position of power who has unfiltered access to the president, the clout to make

things happen, and is removed from the competition between the various agencies. The National Security Advisor and the White House Chief of Staff would both be good picks. Lesser choices would be the Secretary of State or the Secretary of Defense. Because of their understandable allegiance to these departments, the potential exists for slanted views in favor of their respective agencies.

An idea that has been suggested before is to appoint a Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs for Low Intensity Conflict. Congress did not dictate this through legislation, but included this in the "Sense of Congress." The intent was that this individual would chair the LIC Board and take the lead in interagency coordination.<sup>79</sup> In essence he would be the LIC "czar" and would enjoy Presidential support. This would be the ideal solution to the problem of advocacy.

Finally, establish a PCC for LIC under a new National Security Directive that has the same clout as the other regional and functional PCCs and would be the principal interagency forum for the development and implementation of national security policy for LIC. Pursuant to NSD-1, the PCC for LIC would be chaired by a person of Assistant Secretary rank. More importantly, the PCC for LIC, like any other regional or functional PCC, would have unrestricted access to the Deputies Committee with all the associated clout that the Deputies Committee possesses. This organization should function similar to a J5 versus a J3 section, focusing on long range planning and integration.

## CONCLUSION

LIC will remain a difficult challenge for the Clinton Administration, just as it was for the two preceding administrations. If anything, the future promises challenges which are more complex and ambiguous, requiring potentially more sophisticated application of all the elements of national power.

U.S. performance in LIC has been a roller coaster ride. However, the U.S. has all the assets to be successful in virtually any LIC scenario, provided that the resources are properly organized and focused. Success in the field begins inside the "Beltway". If organization is lacking at a national level, success in some remote country thousands of miles away is extremely difficult. The Cold War is over, but the challenges of LIC will certainly remain with the accompanying threats to our security. Acceptance of this fact is the first step on the road to success.

PL 99-661 was controversial legislation. While the target was principally SOF improvements, the law clearly meant to elevate the status of the LIC threat. Two administrations have chosen to comply with letter of the legislation, but to disregard the intent. Our ability to successfully prosecute LIC will continue to be hampered until necessary adjustments are made.

Three years after PL 99-661 was enacted, the U.S. invaded Panama during Operation JUST CAUSE. Was this a military success or a painful indication that we really didn't have an understanding of what it takes to succeed in LIC and therefore we left no other choice but to intervene militarily?

Special operations have significantly improved based on PL 99-661 because DoD, like good soldiers should, saluted and executed, complying with not only the letter of the legislation, but the intent as well. It is now time for the civilian bureaucrats to do the same and restructure so that the LIC Board really does "coordinate the policies of the United States for low intensity conflict" and is not simply an obscure block on some wiring diagram that contributes nothing meaningful.

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